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ON 15 March 1939 the Germans occupied the western portion of the Republic of Czechoslovakia, which was made into a province of the Reich with the name of Bohemia-Moravia, while the eastern portion, Slovakia, became a German protectorate and Carpathian Ruthenia was annexed by Hungary. In a proclamation issued immediately after the annexation, the German Chancellor made certain claims to justify his action, and he elaborated these in his speech to the Reichstag on 28 April. No attempt is made here to deal with the claim that it was the duty of Germany to bring order to Central Europe, for which readers may be referred to Pamphlet No. 10, C. A. Macartney: *The Danubian Basin*, or to extend her 'Lebensraum', for which they may be referred to Pamphlet No. 8, R. R. Kuczynski: *Living-Space and Population Problems*. But both these claims were based on the explicit assumption that History had shown that the Czechs were a race naturally subservient to the Germans, and that the Republic of Czechoslovakia was an artificial creation which could not hope to endure.

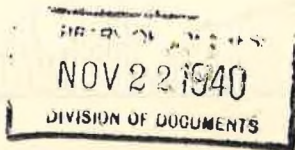
This pamphlet discusses the History and Culture of the Czech people and examines the nature of the Republic which has been destroyed. The author, who is Headmaster of Charterhouse, is an historian who has made a study of the history of the Czech people.

¶ A list of the Oxford Pamphlets will be found on the back of the cover.

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CZECHOSLOVAKIA

A GLANCE at the map of Europe will do much to explain the peculiar position of Bohemia in European history. Situated in the very heart of the continent, with mountains to the west, the north, and the south, but open to the east, it was fated to prove a kind of inlet into which would pour any migrations across Europe from the eastern plains. The essential factors of Bohemia's history were determined by the last of these migrations and by the early destiny of the migratory people, during that period between the sixth and the eleventh centuries when the metal in the mould of Central Europe solidified to form the pattern of races which exists to this day. The mysterious movement of the Slavs brought them into what we now call Germany in the sixth century. In the ninth century began the return of the Teutonic tide, when the Slavs, who had surged forward as far as the line of the River Elbe, were gradually overcome by the better organized Germans. It is a mistake to imagine any process of extermination or of a migration of Slavs back to the east. The Teutonic return, though marked by occasional massacres and the inevitable movements in flight of a defeated people, was a colonization. But while the Slavs of central Germany were in a state of tribal anarchy, in Poland and Bohemia the Teuton found himself faced by kingdoms which were able to organize resistance. It was the fact that Poland and Bohemia had

already in the tenth century moved some way towards political unity that accounts for their continued existence to this day.

The Czechs had entered the Bohemian plain in the sixth century after Christ, the dominant tribe among several who moved in this direction during a confused period of migration. Towards the end of the ninth century they were converted to Christianity. This brought them out of the period of prehistory, giving them the fundamental necessity of any culture, a script. In considering the history of all the peoples of Central and South-eastern Europe the method of their conversion proves to be a decisive factor. And here, at the very beginning, the destiny of Bohemia was made clear. In the ninth century it formed part of a great, if transient, empire, the Moravian kingdom of Svato-pluk. Christianity came to this kingdom from the east through the mission of Cyril and Methodius, and the people of Bohemia received from them the Greek script which even now does much to unite the various members of the Slavonic world. If the Czechs had accepted the Christian missionaries from Bavaria who had attempted to penetrate their mountain frontier a century earlier, Bohemia, though racially the same as it is now, would doubtless be a Teutonic State, with Teutonic language, script, and culture. But, while the Czechs were converted from Constantinople, the turn of History soon cut them off from the East. They repudiated their ecclesiastical connexion with the Byzantine Empire, and accepted the supremacy of Rome. A

century later, in about 975, the first Bishopric of Prague was founded through the efforts of the Archbishop of Mainz. Bohemia had already begun to play its destined role in History as a Slav State, conscious of its Slav origins, but culturally linked with Germany and western Europe.

Bohemia in the Holy Roman Empire

The break-up of Svatopluk's kingdom after his death in 894 created Bohemia. Part of the kingdom, the land of the Slovaks, was overrun by the Magyars, who held it until twenty years ago. In the Bohemian plain a State was slowly to be formed, the so-called Duchy of Bohemia. (There were at first two principalities, the Duchy of Bohemia and the Margravate of Moravia. They were never separated after 1050, but Moravia continued to have certain independent rights). Although Bohemia was strong enough to resist the German colonization which proceeded relentlessly during the following centuries, it could not keep itself entirely free from German domination. At the beginning of the ninth century Charlemagne had united western Christendom in the Holy Roman Empire. Much of his work was soon undone and the fundamental division between French and Teuton was traced broadly in the map of Europe within one generation of the great Emperor. The title and ideals of the Empire were handed down after a century of vicissitudes to the German portion of his realm. So there appeared in Europe the great creation of the Medieval Empire, a federation of States, predominantly German, but

including also Italians and Provençals, Flemings and Walloons, Danes and Slavs, owing allegiance to a figure who represented in men's minds the sovereignty of Rome and the divine sanction of Christ. Of this Empire Bohemia was one such State, and one which gradually gained in political importance and prestige. To have suggested in the Middle Ages that this made Bohemia a German kingdom would have been almost as absurd as to suggest that Milan or Marseilles were German cities. Bohemia owed allegiance to the Emperor, but her country was her own, and her heroes, such as the martyred Duke Wenceslas (the 'Good King Wenceslas' of the English carol), were Czechs, not German statesmen or ecclesiastics ruling a conquered people.

That Bohemia, part of an empire with a German prince as Emperor, situated in the midst of Teutonic lands, should remain unaffected by German influence was, of course, impossible. This influence was immensely strengthened by the appearance in Bohemia of German traders and settlers. Their coming was quite different from that of the German colonization of the Slavonic lands to the north, which was the result of continual military pressure. To Bohemia the Germans came as a result of peace. They filtered over the mountain ranges into the periphery of the country and, in larger numbers, they came to the cities, many of which they actually founded, and to the great trading centre of Prague. To date their arrival is impossible. Their appearance is not heralded by any German victories or successful treaties. But Prague certainly contained

many Germans as early as the eleventh century and this migration was especially fostered in the thirteenth century by Ottokar II, the greatest of the medieval kings of Bohemia. They were to be the cause eventually of one of the most difficult of European problems, but it is essential to realize that in the Middle Ages and for centuries afterwards there was never any suggestion that the political frontiers should be altered because the country came to contain a Teutonic fringe.

By the Golden Bull of Frederick II, issued in 1212, the position of Bohemia in the Empire was made plain. Its rights to its own laws and government and its own choice of its rulers were finally accepted by the Germans. This compact is, perhaps, the clearest evidence which may be produced that the Imperial rights in Bohemia during the Middle Ages did not include any control of the administration of the country. During the second half of the century Bohemia passed through periods of transient greatness and collapse. Ottokar II, the only great aggressor in Czech history, added to his domains Austria, Styria, and Carinthia, but in 1278 the Hapsburg Rudolph shattered this futile dream of domination on the Marchfeld outside Vienna. In 1306 the line of the Přemysl kings, who had ruled the country for five centuries, came to an end. After an unsuccessful attempt by the Hapsburgs to govern the country, the Bohemians elected as their ruler John of Luxemburg, who had married the daughter of the last Přemysl.

John was a German prince, but he was quite

uninterested in his kingdom, and after ten years he left Bohemia to live chiefly in France until he fell on the field of Crécy. The German officials he had introduced were expelled and Bohemia was ruled once more by its own people. In 1323 he had sent for his infant son, Wenceslas, whose name was changed to Charles at his confirmation, to come to France. This youth returned to Bohemia as regent ten years later and, in 1346, he became Holy Roman Emperor. He was, perhaps, the greatest figure in Bohemian history. A Czech by birth and language, he had been brought up in France and destiny had made him a German ruler. Under him the problem of Bohemia seemed to be solved. Its political privileges were ratified, and its position in the Empire as one of the seven electoral powers was secured. Its national independence was upheld and its native culture fertilized by foreign influences, German, French, and Italian. Most striking was the rise of a great Czech school of painting, in which was mingled to produce a remarkable synthesis the Gothic spirituality of French art and the humanism of Italy. The culmination of the school is to be found in the works of the Master of the Trebonsky Altar, one of the greatest of medieval artists. In his paintings of the passion of Christ, the central figure, portrayed with the finest spiritual power, stands isolated among surrounding figures which display the influence of the more humanist conceptions of Italian art.

The most famous of Charles's creations was the University of Prague, the first great centre of learn-

ing in the Empire north of the Alps. It was founded in 1348 to serve the representatives of four 'nations', Bohemians, Poles, Bavarians, and Saxons. Herr Hitler in his speech of 28 April spoke of it as the oldest German university. It was, in fact, at first an international institution. The subsequent rise of universities in Germany led to a decline in the German influence in Prague, and in 1384 the Emperor Wenceslas decreed that the administration of the university should be preponderantly Czech.

The Hussite Movement

The claim by the German Chancellor that he is upholding the German rights of the Holy Roman Empire has made it necessary to study the history of Bohemia in the Middle Ages. The claim cannot possibly be sustained. It depends on a view of the Empire which is an anachronism, it neglects the independence of the Czechs within that Empire, and it denies all originality to Bohemian culture during this period. In any case the claim might be held to be rendered invalid by the fact that at the end of the Middle Ages the Czechs carried through an immense and successful nationalist rising, the Hussite movement.

John Hus was burnt at the Council of Constance in 1415. Four years later Charles's son, Wenceslas IV, died childless and the crown was claimed by his brother, Sigismund, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, the opponent of Hus. The Czechs realized that his accession would mean the condemnation of the new doctrines they had accepted.

It was inevitable that the Germans in Bohemia should support the old faith. The Hussite wars which followed the rejection of Sigismund's claim were at the same time a revolt against Teutonic influence within the country and a resistance to a succession of tremendous crusades from without. They make a wonderful military epic. The Czechs, under the leadership of the blind John Žižka, one of those almost legendary warrior heroes of history, won victory after victory against the vastly more numerous invaders. That the Hussites became themselves disunited, and that the more moderate party eventually overwhelmed the extremists, does not affect the issue. The decisive battle of Lipany in 1434 led to the acceptance of Sigismund, but on terms which safeguarded the essential reforms which Hus had preached and the national independence of the people. The towns of Bohemia now lost almost entirely their German character and on the frontiers whole districts were won back by the Czechs from German settlers.

There are three reasons why the Hussite Revolt is of such immense importance to the Czechs. Their heroic defence in the face of the opposition of almost all Europe gave them a self-confidence which was never quite lost in the darkest days in the future. Further, they could say with pride that they had made an original and independent contribution to European civilization. The ideas of Hus, the demand for the reform of the clergy and for the right of the laity to receive the Communion in both kinds, which symbolized an attack on the privileged

position of the priest, were to influence profoundly the greater movement started by Luther a century later. (A painting in Prague shows Wyclif striking a steel, Hus lighting a candle from the flame, and Luther lighting from this a blazing torch.) But perhaps even more important was the fact that the Czechs now began to develop a national literature of their own.

The period of warfare following the burning of Hus did much, however, to weaken the country. After the death of Sigismund in 1437 there were twenty years of anarchy until the Bohemians elected as their king the nobleman, George Podiebrad, the first truly Czech ruler since the end of the Přemysl dynasty. During his rule of fourteen years the Czechs enjoyed their last period of government by a man of their own nationality until the twentieth century. George was an able and patient statesman. His policy was to uphold the religious compromise which had ended the Hussite wars and to live at peace with his German neighbours. It was a period of national revival, the consummation of her victories, of the greatest days of Czech prose, of a new outburst of Czech art in architecture and painting. But it was a short period. George was succeeded by Vladislav, a Polish prince, who became in 1490 king also of Hungary. He was succeeded by his young son Louis, who perished in 1526 on the fatal field of Mohacz, when the Magyar kingdom went down before the Turk. The Bohemians then elected as their king Ferdinand of Hapsburg, Archduke of Austria, the husband of

Louis' sister, and the union of the crowns of Austria, Hungary, and Bohemia, which was to last for nearly four centuries, brought about the creation of the great Hapsburg dominion and ushered in a new period in the history of the Czech people.

The Hapsburg Empire

The Hapsburg dominions were linked together by the personal sovereignty of one man. To understand their nature it is necessary to consider the nature of this sovereignty. It must be remembered, first, that of all political institutions Monarchy is the one most completely discarded in modern Europe. (Englishmen may resent this statement, but they will realize that the English conception of Monarchy is one so different from the classical conception as to represent really a new political institution altogether.) Only in certain Balkan countries does the Monarchy still retain any of the qualities it used to hold. We must try to think back into a world where the right of the Monarch personally to govern was unquestioned except by the descendants of the feudal nobility and by certain Christian sects. If this right were accepted, it was logically quite irrelevant if the King were a foreigner or if he happened also to rule over other States. Of course, if he ruled tyrannically and if he denied what the people felt to be inalienable rights, of which religious privileges were likely to be the most important, he would have to expect opposition, but the mere fact of his foreign birth would not be enough in itself to excite resistance.

Even before 1526 Bohemia had been united in this way with Hungary. To be united also with Austria would not have altered the situation fundamentally if it had not been for the fact that the ruler of Austria was a German and, after 1556, always the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. The Hapsburg kings of Bohemia did not interfere, for many years, with Bohemian national independence or administration. But in a country always open to German influence, this influence was inevitably strengthened. The Hussite wars had marked a decline in German preponderance in the towns and a forward movement of Czechs towards the frontiers. The sixteenth century saw this movement reversed.

There was another factor, however, of even greater importance. The Lutheran Reformation owed much to its Hussite forerunner, and it was inevitable that in Bohemia, where the ground was already prepared, the Reformation should be largely successful in winning over the people. But the Hapsburg power was the political engine of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, and it was inevitable that the Hapsburgs would not tolerate for long that one of their main dominions should be heretical.

It was the pressure of this religious reaction which brought about the great revolt of 1618, when the Bohemian nobles threw from the windows of the Hradčany Castle in Prague the two Austrian envoys, denounced the Hapsburgs, and elected a new king, Frederick, the Elector Palatine, a

German Protestant prince. By doing this they set in motion forces which led to the Thirty Years War in Germany. The revolt cannot be looked on simply as a nationalist rising. Many fought rather as Protestants for their religion, or as members of the privileged classes against a royal tyranny. But the revolt and its disastrous consequences are rightly regarded by the Czechs as decisive in their history. The Hapsburgs were not slow in reasserting their authority, and on 8 November 1620 the Bohemians were utterly defeated at the Battle of the White Mountain outside Prague.

This defeat did not lead to any very obvious changes in the constitutional position of Bohemia, which remained a separate kingdom in the Hapsburg dominions. But the almost complete extirpation of Protestantism went hand in hand with an attack on the national spirit of the Czechs. The upper classes in Bohemia became German. The centre of power and patronage was the Court at Vienna. Although it is true that the administration of the country remained centred in Prague and that Czech was still spoken in the law-courts and taught in the schools, the nobility and the larger land-owners came to speak German and to think of themselves as German. On the frontiers there was a German advance beyond any limits reached in earlier centuries.

The years after the disaster marked the victory of the Counter-Reformation in Bohemia. This meant, not only that the Czechs became once more a Catholic nation, but that they became part of a

widespread Jesuit culture, the centre of which lay in Vienna. Prague University was handed over to the Jesuits in 1623, and they set about a determined effort to destroy Czech literature. 'In no modern language', it has been said, 'are so many books known to have disappeared.' Czech architecture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, even when the work of builders of Czech nationality, is of the international Jesuit Baroque style. Many of the buildings are masterpieces, and Prague itself, in spite of medieval buildings of great beauty, such as the Cathedral and the Tyn Church, owes its chief splendour to its Baroque. No doubt some differences in style are due to the national origin of some of the architects, but it remains true that architecturally Prague is for this reason not a city with a marked national style. It is significant that the last great figure in Czech culture for nearly two centuries, Comenius, one of the finest figures in the history of Education, was a Protestant who died in exile in 1672. He was one of those men whose genius is universal, but who from that very fact contribute more than any others to the highest form of national pride.

The Battle of the White Mountain did not destroy the Czech nation, but it made them for the first time a subject people and it put a stop to the development of Czech culture. When the rebirth of the nation came, it had to spring from the common people. Until the age of aristocratic supremacy was over, the Czechs could only wait. But the days of their greatness were never forgotten. 'I, too,

believe before God', wrote Comenius, 'that, when the storms of wrath have passed, to thee shall return the rule over thine own things, O Czech people!'

The period between 1620 and 1740 is, therefore, the most empty in Czech history. As a nation the Czechs seemed to be fitting with little trouble into a German framework, though the constitutional independence of the Bohemian Crown remained. In 1740 with the accession of Maria Theresa to the Hapsburg throne came an attempt, lasting for half a century, to make of the nominal union of the Hapsburg dominions a reality.

The Revival of the Czechs

The eighteenth century was the age when Efficiency became the rule of government for the first time since the days of the Roman Empire. Efficiency demanded the centralization of control, the abolition of class privileges and local peculiarities. It led inevitably to an attempt to turn the heterogeneous Hapsburg dominions into a unified state. In 1749 the Empress Maria Theresa united the administration of her Austrian and Bohemian territories, and later the powers of the Bohemian assembly (or Diet) were curtailed. But the eighteenth century was also the age of Enlightenment. Maria Theresa's son, Joseph II, weakened the power of the Church, granted religious toleration, abolished serfdom, and fostered education. The German language was encouraged in the elementary schools, Czech was forbidden in the secondary

schools, and in 1784 German became the official language of the country. This policy of German centralization was continued after Joseph's death, without the enlightenment.

But a far stronger force was at work than this Germanization from above. The French Revolution brought with it a stirring of popular self-consciousness all over Europe. It began to make politically conscious the middle classes, and in Bohemia these were still Czech. It caused men to doubt the rights of rulers, and it was on these rights that the German control of Bohemia was really based. From these new political beliefs sprang modern nationalism, and in Central and Eastern Europe that meant the rise of Slav nationalism. This might take two forms, a feeling of fellowship among all the Slav peoples, who looked naturally to the one great State they had produced, the Russian Empire, and a revived memory of the history of the individual Slav States of earlier days, one of which was Bohemia.

Modern Bohemia grew out of Slav nationalism, but it was given direction by the fact that Bohemia had once been an independent kingdom and had never quite lost its independence. It was created by intellectual leaders making use of the new political consciousness of the middle and lower classes who still felt themselves to be Czech. Their weapons were the two factors which above all else make men feel themselves to be a nation, Language and History. We find, then, that the leaders of the Czechs in the early nineteenth century are

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philologists and historians. (When we think of the importance to Irishmen of their long history and of their language, Erse, this will not seem so strange to us). Dobrovský and others taught the Czechs that they had a language of their own, and an incident of that time is significant of what they undertook. Some of these first nationalists heard two girls of the bourgeois class who had been speaking Czech drop into German at their approach, saying, 'Take care that they do not hear us talk Czech; they will take us for peasants.' Literary Czech had to be recreated from a despised tongue. Germans still speak of it as a 'kitchen-language'. The greatest of all was the historian, Palacký. He first taught the Czechs the greatness of their national history and called them to their mission to create a State founded on the ideals of Democracy and Justice.

The nineteenth century is the history of the revival of the Czechs. It is an intricate story. They desired to become independent once more within the framework of the Austrian Empire. In 1848, the year of revolutions, they seemed, under the leadership of Palacký, to come near to their goal. In March 1849 an Imperial Parliament met at Kremsier in Moravia and drew up a revised constitution for the Empire, which would have transformed it into a Federation, giving the Czechs a national independence under Hapsburg sovereignty. The rejection of this constitution by the Emperor is one of the turning-points of modern European history. From that moment the Hapsburgs could only try to hold their Empire together against one

of the main currents of the age, Slav nationalism. Many experiments were tried and at times it looked to the Czechs as if they would after all gain the autonomy they desired, but no decisive change was ever carried out. The fact that in 1867 the Magyars did gain such autonomy and that the Austrian Empire became a Dual State only served to accentuate their own inferiority.

It was to be expected that Czech nationalism would find expression in an artistic revival. Naturally it took time for a national literature to appear, and it must be remembered that until after the War of 1914-18 there was no call for translations from what was an unknown language. But there is one medium which is peculiarly suitable for the expression of an awakening national spirit, and it is one that needs no translation. It was through their music that the Czechs made themselves known to Europe and in the works of their composers, especially Smetana and Dvořák, can be seen clearly the peculiar spirit of the Czech renaissance. The Czechs had belonged for centuries to an international culture, and these composers are clearly influenced in style and form by the great musicians of their age. But the new Czech culture was inevitably bound up with the spirit of the common people, from whose racial consciousness it had sprung. We find, therefore, the Czech composers bringing into a musical style which is essentially mature and civilized an atmosphere which is primitive and simple. (Much the same was naturally observable in the work of the great Russian composers.) Smetana was the

founder of the Czech school and much of his work in operas or orchestral compositions was based on the folk-songs of the people. He took Liszt's invention of the symphonic poem, as an attempt to express musically some particular piece of poetry, and developed it more freely as an attempt to describe the scenery of the country and incidents in the life of the people. Smetana is, perhaps, the most nationalist of all the nineteenth-century composers. An absolute sincerity prevents his work from becoming affected, a sophisticated effort to catch the charm of peasant music, as is the case with many nationalist composers since his day.

The nineteenth century saw, then, the rise of Czech nationalism and the attempt to express this by the creation of an autonomous Bohemian kingdom within the Austrian Empire. It saw also the appearance of a most serious racial problem within Bohemia itself. As has been shown, since the eleventh century Bohemia had contained a German minority. As long as nationalism was not a vital factor in European political life, this was not a particularly serious difficulty, though at those times when the Czechs had had to struggle against the Germans the presence of this minority had naturally acerbated the quarrel. The Hapsburg victory at the White Mountain had made the ruling classes German in speech and sentiment. But self-conscious national feeling turned the presence of Germans in the frontier districts and in the larger towns into a real problem. During the nineteenth century the Czechs appeared to recover much of the ground lost

during the last two hundred years, and towns and districts which had had a German majority seemed to lose this to the Czechs.

Racial Minorities

It is necessary to examine rather more closely the nature of these so-called racial distinctions. We have seen how the Hussite wars had led to a Czech advance, the Hapsburg victory to a Czech retreat, and the rise of Slav nationalism to an advance again. It is impossible to rule out altogether the effect of actual movements of people, and it must not be forgotten that migrations are phenomena which do not occur only in the Dark Ages of history. The Industrial Revolution made Bohemia the main workshop of the Austrian Empire, and the increased prosperity of the manufacturing areas caused many peasants, who were Czechs, to come into towns which had before had German majorities. But to ascribe the changes, either in the later Middle Ages or in the nineteenth century, merely to the movements of peoples is to misunderstand completely the nature of the 'mixed' districts of Central Europe. In such districts families often can scarcely say to which race they belong. Inter-marriage is frequent, and the children of the unions of peoples of two races may be hard put to it to decide from which race they sprang.¹ Innumerable factors come into

¹ The writer knew an Alsatian family living in Strasbourg who spoke to him of their immense enthusiasm as they had awaited the entry of the French troops in 1918. But one member of the family confessed to him that she had been surprised to find that she felt no enthusiasm whatever, and that she had then realized that she

play. The division often followed the lines of the classes, as the privileged classes were in close touch with the German rulers. As the Czechs gained prestige during the century, more and more people who were bilingual and divided in their racial loyalty began to think of themselves as Czech. The censuses held during that century, which distinguished between Czechs and Germans, made men more self-conscious about their nationality and forced them to come to a decision, and, since many questions, above all as to the language of the schools, often depended on these figures, the struggle to persuade men to give their allegiance to one side or the other became fiercer. The language in which a child received its education might become the decisive factor in determining its future nationality and the laws regulating the establishment of Czech or German schools in the different districts were fought over with the utmost bitterness. There is something intrinsically unreal about any attempt to determine the exact figures of any minority problem in Central Europe, but there is nothing unreal about the violence of the feeling engendered by the herself was 'German', while all the rest of her brothers and sisters were 'French'.

Two examples may be given to illustrate this mixture of races. The great soldier Wallenstein (1583-1634) was a Bohemian. His father came of a family which originated in Styria, moved to Bohemia in the twelfth century, and settled on the northern frontier. His mother came of a famous Czech family of the Smiřický. He was born a Protestant, but became a Catholic. The father of Dr. Masaryk, the first President of the Republic, was a Slovak, who moved to a village in Moravia where his son was born. His mother was a Czech, educated at a German school, who had some difficulty later in learning to speak her native language.

passion of nationalism in these areas of mixed race, nor about the existence of a large German minority in Bohemia, nor about the peculiar strength of national rivalries in that country.

The Republic of Czechoslovakia

No attempt is being made here to write a history of the Czech people, only to consider how far they may be said to have a tradition and culture of their own. It is not necessary, therefore, to show how under the leadership of two professors, Masaryk and Beneš, they were able to make use of the World War to create an independent Republic of Czechoslovakia. That this was made possible by the war was kept fresh in the memories of the Czechs by the strange custom that the guards at the Hradčany palace in Prague wore always the uniforms of the French, Italian, and Russian armies in which Czech deserters had fought for their country's freedom. It is too early to set down these events in the balance-sheet of the nation's history. In due course, no doubt, the heroic episodes of these days, the long retreat of the Czech legionaries across Russia and Siberia and their return by Canada, the control exercised by the scholar Masaryk over the soldiers, the escape of Dr. Beneš to Switzerland, the foundation of the Republic in another continent,¹ the resistance

¹ The independence of the Czechs was proclaimed in America on 14 November 1915. The existence of large numbers of Czech immigrants in the United States, living in a free country, is a factor not to be forgotten. The most famous piece of Czech music, Dvořák's 'New World' Symphony, was written after a visit to Czech settlements in America.

to the attempt to destroy the Czech language, these will be added to the store of national memories, to the tales of Hus and Žižka and George Podiebrad, the defeat of the White Mountain, the suppression of the rising of 1848.

But some consideration is necessary of the new State which appeared in 1918. It is often said that this was created by the politicians of Versailles. This statement may bear three meanings. It may be taken to suggest that the Czechs and Slovaks gained their independence as a result of the peace negotiations. This is obviously untrue. The Czech National Committee took over the government in Prague at the end of October 1918, and the Slovak National Council declared the independence of their country from Austria on 30 October. Or it may be taken to mean that the German minority was included in the State as a result of the negotiators' fiat.¹ This is also untrue. The boundaries between Czechoslovakia and Germany and Austria were the historic boundaries of the Kingdom of Bohemia, stabilized for nine hundred years except in the Egerland, added to Bohemia in the fourteenth century, and on the Silesian frontier, drawn up after the wars between Austria and Frederick the Great of Prussia. The Czechs gained nothing new except the Hlučín territory near Troppau, occupied

¹ A number of an English review, published in the summer of 1938, contained a photograph of Sudeten women saluting Herr Hitler at Breslau and the words, 'it brings home poignantly the depth of feeling, the passionate longing and the heartbreak that lay behind the struggle of the Sudeten Germans to regain their Fatherland'. Such misunderstandings were common at the time in England.

by a Czech-speaking people, the railway-station, though not the town, of Gmund, and a short stretch of a river near Nikolsburg.

It is obvious that the Czechoslovak Republic was something quite different from the old Kingdom of Bohemia and Moravia. It is not true that the allied statesmen at Versailles caused the Slovaks and Ruthenians to unite with the Czechs, though it may be allowed that they set their seal on the union. The Slovak nationalists had decided to join the Czechs during the War and they had declared the union in June 1918. The provisional government of Carpathian Ruthenia proclaimed its union in May 1919, though it may be reasonably doubted how far this body of men could be said to represent the people of this primitive territory. It is, however, necessary to consider what were the real links between the Czechs and these people.

Slovakia had formed part of the Moravian Empire of the ninth century. It had been conquered by the Magyars and had remained part of Hungary until the end of the War. It is amazing that through a millennium the Slovaks preserved their own language and their racial identity. In 1848 the Slovaks had demanded without success the introduction of the Slovak language into their schools and an independent regional parliament. The Hungarians, after they had gained independence under the Austrian Crown in 1867, did all they could to destroy Slovak nationalism. The Slovaks continued to look on themselves as a people with their own traditions, and in spite of their naturally strong connexions

with the Czechs they did not wish their own identity to be merged in that of their neighbours. In the eighteenth century Czech had been their literary language, and it had needed a conscious effort on the part of scholars to create a fresh one out of a Slovak dialect. This effort was successful. But while the Slovaks did not want to be absorbed by the Czechs, it was difficult to see how they could remain entirely separate. Slovakia was, and is, too small and poor to form an independent State. To be incorporated once more in Hungary would mean the end of all their hopes; to be a protectorate of Germany is an unnatural and unhistorical solution. Slovakia has never been German, and it was never even within the boundaries of the Holy Roman Empire. A union of Czechs and Slovaks is the only reasonable solution of the problem, but it may be laid to the charge of the Czechs that they never fully appreciated the strength of Slovak nationalism. There was no attempt to destroy their language or their culture, but there was undoubtedly some failure to understand this people, far less advanced politically and industrially than the Czechs themselves.

The Carpathian Ruthenians are one of the insoluble problems of Europe. By the tie of race they should be united to the Ukrainians, now divided between Poland and Russia. Although their territory had belonged to Hungary for centuries, their reconquest by the Magyars is a reversal of history. There is no particular reason why they should have been joined to Czechoslovakia, except that they could

not possibly stand alone and they wished above all else to free themselves from their old rulers.

It is claimed that Czechoslovakia has failed to prove that it could exist as an independent State. It is possible, perhaps, to subject its recent history to a few simple tests. It is difficult for English people to realize the confusion that existed in Central Europe in the months after the Armistice. Things settled down so extraordinarily quickly in the west; men's minds were turned inwards to their own post-War problems, and they failed to recognize the difficulties of the east. But Czechoslovakia was administered from the very beginning with a calm assurance which was amazing in a new state. When the financial systems of Central Europe collapsed in the period between 1920 and 1924 it remained an island of financial security. But what is most remarkable was the lack of any hysteria, any panic in face of the new and troublous world. In Czechoslovakia the Truth remained free. Few things are more significant of a kind of adult national assurance than a remark made by Masaryk, the first President of the Republic: 'What's the use of talking? A normal individual does not go about trumpeting abroad the fact that he loves his parents, his wife, his children; that is taken for granted. . . . I was always held back by a kind of shame from saying the words, "my country", "my nation".'

There remains the question of the German minority. No one can claim that the Czechs solved this problem, nor could it have been solved in twenty years. The struggle was carried on much as

it had been in the century before the War, but with this difference, the Czechs were now the rulers. But it is impossible to give judgement on this question without comparing the treatment of the Germans in Czechoslovakia with that of other minorities in Central Europe, such as the Germans in the South Tyrol, for instance. The Czechs can stand the test without much discomfort. It must be realized also that social movements would inevitably have repercussions on the problem of the minorities. For instance, agrarian reforms, similar to those carried out in many other European countries, led to the planting of peasants, who were incidentally Czechs, on lands belonging to owners, who were incidentally Germans, though one can say further that Czech peasants, especially ex-soldiers of the Czech legions, had preferential treatment. It would be absurd to claim that the Czechs made no mistakes, that thoughts of revenge never entered their minds. But the essential factor was that a ruling minority had lost its superior position and could never be satisfied with a new status.

In 1938 the Germans demanded first a change in the constitution of Czechoslovakia to give security to the minority and then, when this was granted, a rectification of the frontiers to bring within the Reich the predominantly German districts.¹ The

¹ Herr Hitler has himself stated that he had decided at the beginning of the year, 1938, to secure the Sudeten areas for the Reich. The attempts by the Czechs to grant the Germans full minority rights were, therefore, in fact quite useless.

Czechs claimed that a breach in their mountain walls would lay them open to invasion whenever the Germans willed it, and so force them to become a subservient State. Events have proved that they were right. It is difficult indeed to defend the method by which the changes were made, without Czech representation, at the Conference at Munich which decided their fate and allowed their defences to be occupied before the line of the new frontier was traced. And yet from a long view it is possible to argue that some change in the frontier was inevitable.

The frontiers themselves were among the oldest in Europe. They go back to the days of the early Middle Ages when many of the frontiers of Europe were drawn. (The frontier between England and Scotland, for instance, except for Westmorland, was fixed by the Scottish victory at Carham in 1018.) But the rise of nationalism raised doubts inevitably about all these settled boundaries. The frontier between Austria and Hungary was fixed on the River Leitha by a treaty in 1043; it is difficult to see why a fluctuating boundary should suddenly have become static at this date. It remained unchanged until 1919, when a portion of the Burgenland peopled by Germans was given to Austria. The mass in the crucible is melted once more by the rise of Nationalism, a reversion to a tribal spirit. It is hardly to be expected that it will solidify into exactly the same forms as of old.

But the essential problem for Czechoslovakia was one of Foreign Policy. It is easy to see that the

Republic made mistakes. It was particularly regrettable that its relations with the other new Slav State of Poland were not more harmonious. But its position was infinitely difficult. That Czechoslovakia should become an ally of France was inevitable. Her first problem was to retain her independence against the Germans from whom she had gained it. The Republic leant on the League of Nations, partly because its political ideals were those of the Western democracies who created the League in the natural development of their own political ideals, but also because the League was dominated by France. As long as Germany was weak the position of Czechoslovakia was relatively secure and at first her chief need seemed to be to prevent the restoration of a Hapsburg dominion over Austria and Hungary, but when Germany became strong her real danger was manifest.

Conclusion

The tragedy of Bohemia lies in its geographical position, dividing the Teutonic world. She could not help being an obstacle to any German ambitions to dominate Central and South-Eastern Europe. Provided there was no such ambition a *modus vivendi* with the Germans was not only desirable, but necessary. The Czechs are too small a nation to be able to indulge in the luxury of economic self-sufficiency. But a strong and independent Bohemia must be an obstacle to German territorial expansion, and all the stories of Russian airfields near Prague for the bombing of Berlin were

but attempts to conceal the consciousness of this fact.

In the fifteenth century a Czech writer had written of his vision of a tree, laden with fruit and crowded with birds. Each time, as the birds fluttered up to reach the fruit on the highest branches, a youth came with a pole to strike them down to the earth. Is this the whole story of Bohemia? Again and again the Czechs have won their independence to lose it again. Ottokar II fell before Rudolph of Hapsburg, John Hus was burnt by the Emperor Sigismund, George Podiebrad was followed by the Hapsburgs and the battle of the White Mountain, Masaryk and Beneš by the humiliation of Munich and the terrible night when President Hacha signed away the independence of his country in the Chancellery at Berlin. But if Czech nationalism is a fact, it cannot be ignored. No settlement in Europe can be permanent which ignores it. If the people of Bohemia feel themselves a nation, if their exploits in the past and their literature and art are to them unforgettable, then no amount of the sophistry of political propaganda can destroy what they have themselves created.

On 15 March 1939 a free and independent State was destroyed. The conqueror held that its independence could only be ephemeral, that historically the State was destined to be subject to its stronger neighbour. This has demanded investigation, a study of the history and the culture of the State subdued. But no Englishman can consider this question and weigh the claims of the Czechs

to be a free people without feeling that he is guilty of impertinence. One who has heard the men and women of this race speak of their national history, who has read of Charles IV and John Hus and Palacký, who has stood in St. Vitus' Cathedral by the tomb of St. Wenceslas, who has watched the flowing Vltava and heard Smetana's Symphonic Poem to the river, where the songs of the people mingle with the surge of the waters, such a one *knows* that the Czechs are a nation and that their greatness through ten centuries of history is their own.



CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1919

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